

Message Text

SECRET

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13

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2663

AMEMBASSY ROME

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 1590

EXDIS

ROME FOR ILLING

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT VS VT

SUBJECT: VATICAN VIEWS ON VIETNAM

REF: ROME 1698

1. WE THINK THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI AS REPORTED IN REFTEL ARE GREATLY OVERDRAWN AND PROBABLY THE RESULT OF THE PESSIMISM WHICH HAS BEEN CHARACTERISTIC OF LEMAITRE (THE APOSTOLIC DELEGATE IN SAIGON) COMPOUNDED BY AN EXCESS OF ZEAL ON PART OF AMBASSADOR NGUYEN VAN HIEU IN MAKING WHAT HE BELIEVES TO BE A STRONG CASE FOR SUPPLEMENTAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM THE US. WE RECOMMEND THAT ILLING GO BACK TO CASAROLI AND SPEAK TO HIM ON THE BASIS OF THE POINTS OUTLINED BELOW:

2. HANOI'S DECISION -- ARRIVED AT LATE LAST SUMMER -- TO PLACE RENEWED EMPHASIS ON A HIGH INTENSIVE MILITARY EFFORT IN THE SOUTH DURING THE 1975 DRY SEASON HAS CREATED A SERIOUS SITUATION. IT WAS THE RESULT OF WHAT HANOI PERCEIVED TO BE WAVERING OF US SUPPORT FOR SOUTH VIETNAMESE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM. NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS NO DOUBT IN OUR MIND THAT THE ANSWER TO CASAROLI'S RHETORICAL QUESTION: "DOES THE USG NOT WHINK SOUTH VIETNAM CAN MAINTAIN ITSELF AGAINST COMMUNIST ADVERSARIES?" IS A HCR AND UNEQUIVOCAL YES; IT CAN AND WILL DO SO.

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3. AS THE PRESIDENT, THE SECRETARY OF STATE, THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AND OTHER SENIOR US GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE MADE CLEAR, WE WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO PERSUADE THE CONGRESS TO APPROVE AN ADDITIONAL \$300 MILLION IN MILITARY ASSISTANCE APPROPRIATIONS FOR VIETNAM THIS CURRENT YEAR. WE WILL DO SO NOT ONLY BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE DESERVE IT AND SHOULD HAVE IT TO CONDUCT A FORCEFUL AND AGGRESSIVE DEFENSE OF THEIR COUNTRY, BUT ALSO TO MAKE CLEAR TO HANOI THAT THE US IS NOT WAVERING IN ITS SUPPORT. THE USG, FOR ITS PART, IS TAKING EVERY POSSIBLE STEP TO MAXIMIZE THE VALUE WE GET FOR EVERY DOLLAR IN TERMS OF AMMUNITION, FUEL, COMMUNICATIONS, MEDICAL SUPPLIES THAT WE CAN PUT ON THE GROUND IN VIETNAM. EVEN IF WE SHOULD NOT SUCCEED IN PERSUADING THE CONGRESS WE CONSIDER AMBASSADORTHIEU'S VIEW THAT IT IS "DOBUTFUL WHETHER RVN COULD HOLD OUT FOR THE REMAINDER OF THIS YEAR" TO BE TOTALLY UNJUSTIFIED AND NOT SHARED BY PRESIDENT THIEU, PRIME MINISTER KHIEM OR OTHER TOP LEADERS OF THE RVN.

4. FACED BY A MOST DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX MILITARY SITUATION, THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES HAVE PERFORMED AND CONTINUE TO PERFORM WITH GREAT SKILL AND COURAGE. THEY HAVE TIGHTENED UP THEIR MANAGEMENT AND LOGISTICS PROCEDURES CONSIDERABLY IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE ENDEMIC WASTEFULNESS OF WARFARE TO A MINIMUM AND CUT OUT ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT BE CONSIDERED REDUNDANT OR A LUXURY. IF, AS A RESULT OF A FAILURE BY THE US CONGRESS TO APPROPRIATE THE \$300 MILLION ALREADY AUTHORIZED BY THE LAST CONGRESS, THEY HAVE TO SACRIFICE LIVES AND PERHAPS SOME TERRITORY TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDPENDENCE FROM COMMUNIST RULE THEY WILL DO SO.

5. SINCE AVAILABLREGULAR AND TERRITORIAL FORCES HAVE BEEN STRETCH-ED THIN TO DEFEND THE COUNTRY SOME ORGANIZATIONAL STEPS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN TAKEN TO FORM NEW COMBAT UNITS. CERTAIN SUPPORT AND SERVICE UNITS NO LONGER REQUIRED BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE BEEN ABOLISHED. A NEW RESERVE HAS BEEN FORMED. THE NECESSARY ARMS AND EQUIPMENT FOR THESE NEWLY CONSTITUTED RESERVE UNITS ARE ON HAND. WE SHOULD ALSO NOTE THE THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY PEFORM BEST UNDER STRAIN, AS DURING THEIR REMARKABLE RECOVERY FROM THE FIRST IMPACT OF THE MASSIVE COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE OF 1972.

6. THE RECENT LOSS OF PHUOC LONG PROVINCE WASOF COURSE A REVERSE. AS SUCH IT HAS RECEIVED MUCH PUBLICITY. PHUOC LONG, HOWEVER, IS
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A REMOTE PROVINCE LARGELY CONSISTING OF JUNGLE WITH A POPULATION OF ABOUT 45,000 AND WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO DEFEND. FROM THE OUTSET, THE DECISION AS TO RESOURCES TO BE DEVOTED TO ITS DEFENSE BALANCED THE COST OF AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO HOLD PHUOC LONG, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE FACT THAT RESUPPLY MUST BE BY AIR, AGAINST THE NEED FOR AVAILABLE GVN FORCES FOR HIGHER PRIORITY PURPOSES. OUR ESTIMATE OF THE TACTICAL CONDUCT OF OPERATIONS FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE PROV- INCE AND ITS CAPITAL PHUOC BINH IS THAT, FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE

NVA ATTACK TO THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL'S FALL, THE DEFENSE WAS ABLY CONDUCTED AGAINST GREAT ODDS AND WITH LOSSES HELD TO A MINIMUM.

7. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN SOME REVERSES IN THE DELTA (BUT AT A VERY HEAVY COST TO THE NVA) BUT NOT A CHANGE IN THE BASIC BALANCE FAVORING THE GOVERNMENT. WE WOULD EXPECT THAT SOME RECENT CHANGES IN COMMAND AND ENERGETIC MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE TERRITORIAL FORCES WILL LEAD TO AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE SITUATION THERE.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 1590

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ROME FOR ILLING

WHILE THE GOVERNMENT'S REVERSES TEND TO BE PUBLICIZED ITS SUCCESSES ARE MOST OFTEN IGNORED. THE RECENT RECAPTURE OF MO TAU MOUNTAIN IN MR 1 AND THE DEFEAT INFILCTED ON THE NVA/VC IN THE IRON TRIANGLE AREA NORTH OF SAIGON LATE LAST FALL ARE TWO VERY RECENT EXAMPLES. (ROME MAY WISH TO PASS ON ALL, OR PORTIONS, OF SAIGON'S 1236 SETTING FORTH EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE RVNAF PERFORMANCE.)

9. AS FOR THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE, WE BELIEVE THE VARIOUS OPPOSITION GROUPS WHICH HAVE RECEIVED SO MUCH PRESS ATTENTION, BOTH LOCALLY AND IN THE FOREIGN PRESS, ARE LARGELY FROTH ON THE POLITICAL POT. MOST OBSERVERS, INCLUDING SOME IN THE FOREIGN PRESS, NOW BELIEVE THEIR IMPORTANCE WAS ORIGINALLY MUCH OVERSTATED. PRESIDENT THIEU DOES HAVE CRITICS BUT THE IMPORTANT OPPOSITION, INCLUDING THE CATHOLIC OPPOSITION OF SUBSTANCE, IS MODERATE AND HAS NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN MOST OF THE PROTEST ACTIVITY OVER PAST

SIX MONTHS.

10. OUR MOST RECENT ASSESSMENT OF PEOPLE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT OF FATHER TRAN HUU THANH WAS CONTAINED IN SAIGON 1231. WE ARE REPEATING TO ROME SAIGON 1289, 1341, 1465, AND 1466 WHICH DEAL WITH RECENT EVENTS IN THE PRESS WORLD.

11. OBVIOUSLY, BODY POLITIC DOES SUFFER FROM PRESSURES OF DEPRESSED ECONOMIC SITUATION (IN COMMON WITH MANY OTHER COUNTRIES), CONTIN-

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UING WAR, AND UNCERTAINTY ABOUT SCALE OF US ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM. THERE WILL NO DOUBT BE CONTINUING CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT AND INCREASING POLITICAL ACTIVITY AS THE OCTOBER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION APPROACHES. HOWEVER, THE ANTI-COMMUNIST SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE OF THE RVN AND THEIR DETERMINATION TO RESIST NORTH VIETNAME'S AGGRESSION REMAIN STRONG.

12. IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND THE DRV ALSO HAS PROBLEMS WHICH ARE CONCEALED BY TECHNIQUES OF TOTALITARIAN RULE FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD. NORTH VIETNAM HAS BEEN PLAGUED FOR YEARS WITH AN INABILITY TO FEED ITSELF, AND COMMUNIST EFFORTS TO FORCIBLY COLLECTIVIZE AGRICULTURE HAVE RESULTED IN EVEN GREATER FOOD DEFICITS. THE SMALL FREE MARKET IN FARM PRODUCTS IS BOOMING BUT HAS BEEN SEVERELY HAMPERED BY OFFICIAL RESTRICTIONS AND HOSTILITY, AND THE COMMUNIST PRESS MAKES FREQUENT REFERENCES TO WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION, THEFT, AND FAVORITISM IN ALL ECONOMIC SPHERES. THERE ARE REPORTS OF SCATTERED STRIKES OVER POOR LIVING CONDITIONS. THE COMMUNIST BUREAUCRACY CANNOT COPE WITH THE MANPOWER DEMANDS OF BOTH THE WAR AND THE ECONOMY, PRODUCING INCREDIBLE INEFFICIENCY. SOME STUDENTS RETURNING FROM ABROAD WERE REPORTEDLY ARRESTED AND EXECUTED LAST YEAR WHEN THEY DEMONSTRATED AGAINST CONTINUED WAR AND THE UNAVAILABILITY OF SUITABLE JOBS FOR THEM.

13. THE LONG WAR HAS HAD ITS EFFECT ON MORALE THROUGHOUT NORTH VIETNAM. PARTY JOURNALS CONTINUALLY REFER TO PROBLEMS AMONG, FOR EXAMPLE, RETURNED VETERANS, WRITERS, AND THE MILITARY, MANY OF WHOM ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY IMPATIENT WITH THE DRV'S CONTINUATION OF THE WAR AND ARE HESITANTLY RAISING THEIR VOICES AGAINST THEIR RULERS' DEMANDS FOR CONTINUED SACRIFICE. THERE ARE EVEN STRONG SIGNS OF HIGH-LEVEL DISSENSION WITHIN THE PARTY ITSELF TO THE OFFICIAL LINE ON THE GUNS-AND-BUTTER ISSUE. THE POLITBURO SEEMS IMPALED ON THE DILEMMA OF PROVIDING VAST AMOUNTS OF VERY SCARCE RESOURCES FOR BOTH THE CONTINUING WAR IN THE SOUTH AND DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH, AND THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONSTANT DEMAND FOR CONTINUED TOIL AND DEPRIVATION. WHILE ALL THIS DOES NOT POINT TO POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION IN NVN, IT DOES SHOW THAT HANOI ITSELF IS FAR FROM FREE OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RESTRAINTS.

14. DRV PROPAGANDA HAS MADE QUITE CLEAR THAT HANOI IS DISSATISFIED WITH THE SUPPORT GIVEN BY THE USSR AND CHINA, PARTICULARLY

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THE LATTER. BECAUSE OF THE LARGE STOCKPILES ALREADY ON HAND, AND BECAUSE OF CONTINUING SUPPLY AT A CERTAIN LEVEL, DRV COULD CARRY ON A MASSIVE OFFENSIVE FOR A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD OF TIME. HOWEVER, IT SEEMS THAT HANOI DOES NOT FEEL IT CAN COUNT ON AUTOMATIC RESUPPLY FROM THE USSR OR CHINA, AND THIS IS ALSO A CONSTRAINT ON THE NORTH AS IT PLANS WHAT LEVEL OF MILITARY ACTIVITY TO PURSUE IN THE SOUTH.

15. THE FOREGOING IS NOT MENTIONED AS CONSITUTING PROOF THAT THE DRV IS READY TO GIVE UP ITS ATTEMPTS TO TAKE OVER THE SOUTH, BUT MERELY TO MAKE CLEAR THAT DRV ALSO HAS PROBLEMS WHICH PUT SOME LIMITS ON WHAT IT CAN ACHIEVE IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

16. IN SUMMARY, IT IS OUR VIEW THAT THE CURRENT SITUATION IN VIETNAM, DIFFICULT AS IT IS, DOES NOT JUSTIFY A CHANGE IN APPROACH FOR PRACTICAL REASONS AND CERTAINLY NOT ON MORAL GROUNDS. NOTWITHSTANDING OUR OBVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL PROBLEMS THE ADMINISTRATION IS DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN A LEVEL OF US SUPPORT FOR SOUTH VIETNAM WHICH WILL ENABLE THE COUNTRY TO MAINTAIN ITS INDEPENDENCE AND EVENTUALLY LEAD TO PEACE FOR ITS PEOPLE. WE WILL APPRECIATE THE VATICAN'S CONTINUED SUPPORT TO THIS END.

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